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The *Employment Studies* newsletter reports on IES research on labour market and employment policy and practice in the UK and abroad. It is aimed at those interested in research to inform the development and implementation of public policy. Two other publications, *Research Digest* and *HR Insight*, provide briefings on IES employer-related work.

Insights into sector skills needs

Jim Hillage, Director of Research

With nominally five people chasing every job it is not surprising that skill shortages across the economy are at record lows. However, at sectoral level there are still major concerns that a lack of the right sort of skills in critical areas could hold back economic recovery and damage future UK competitiveness. As consumer demand evolves and technological change creates new markets and ways of working, the skills required to deliver effective performance also change. Employers will increasingly have to find new ways of ensuring that prospective and existing employees possess the required skills.

IES has been working with the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick to produce a series of reports for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), examining the main performance challenges faced by employers in eight key sectors, and the skills solutions available to address them. The IES reports cover the digital and creative, energy, health and social care and tourism sectors and below we look at the key findings. In addition, IER has produced reports on advanced manufacturing, construction, retail and professional and business services.

Creating a digital economy

The digital and creative sector is one of the key strands of the Government's growth strategy. The UK has one of the most influential and successful creative sub-sectors in the world and the digital industry is one of the most productive and fastest growing parts of the economy. However, to continue to be successful the sector as a whole faces a number of the crucial challenges, including:

- Recruiting sufficient high-level skills to support predicted growth, particularly in the digital side of the sector.
- Ensuring that the education and training young people receive in their initial

education is of sufficient quality to keep pace with technological and business developments, especially in the creative sector.

- Getting employers to invest more in workplace training to offer employees the opportunity to refresh their technical skills in a fast-changing environment.
- Finding ways for the large number of small employers and freelancers in the sector to work together to provide access to workplace training more efficiently.

Employers, skills agencies and education and learning providers are already engaged in tackling these challenges and the report highlighted a number of ways in which employers and others could do more. Employers could widen their recruitment pools, for example, to bring in more women, particularly into the digital side of the sector. They could also work more closely with education and training providers, provide better in-house training and development, and provide more work experience placements and internships. Smaller firms could be encouraged to collaborate through voluntary training levies and group training associations. Other solutions include: developing more high-level vocational routes into the sector (for example, through advanced/higher apprenticeships);

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developing more accredited courses to guarantee their quality; and increasing the range of information, advice and guidance available to young people.

Fuelling the energy sector

The UK energy sector is relatively small in employment terms but is one of the most productive parts of the economy. Its importance will only increase in the future as the economy strives to meet the challenge of the low carbon agenda and to achieve greater energy security. Technology will be central to meeting these challenges but will create substantial skills needs. Employers can help ensure a sufficient supply of skills by:

- Making the sector more attractive to science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates by getting involved in initiatives to promote the sector, and encouraging existing employees to act as ambassadors and extol the virtues of working in the sector.
- Developing alternative pathways into the sector below full degree level, through further promoting apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees.
- Further increasing investment in workforce development, principally among smaller employers who can find it difficult to source and organise training effectively, for example through a voluntary training levy or Skills Passports. This could provide a recognised accreditation of the competency of employees to work in a highly-skilled sector.

Managing improved customer service in the tourism sector

Tourism is another key sector that is expected to grow significantly over the next ten years, with employment and productivity also expected to rise. It faces a series of specific skill challenges which the sector will increasingly need to address, including:

- Securing a sufficient supply of skills to the sector to meet expected high levels of expansion and replacement demand, by offering work tasters, work experience placements and expanding the number and quality of apprenticeships. The sector relies heavily on transient labour and employers will need to look to alternative labour pools to meet their recruitment needs, such as women returners and early retirees.
- Continually improving the skill base of existing staff to minimise skill gaps and



make up for skill shortages, including investing in management skills and customer service skills. Management skills are crucial for the sector to make the most of the market opportunities available and in particular to engage and motivate staff to ensure high levels of performance and minimise labour turnover.

- Improving employee engagement and motivation and minimising labour turnover, so that employers and employees can reap the benefits of training and improved customer service.

Doing more with less in health and social care

The health and social care sector is of great significance to the UK's economic and social wellbeing. It is a major employer in its own right and also a major contributor to UK productivity through its role in keeping the wider workforce healthy and productive.

Demand for health and social care has risen steadily and has been stimulated in part by some key demographic changes, such as a growing and ageing population and changes in lifestyle choices that affect health. Technological innovation has also transformed practice and is continuing to shape skills demand in the sector. Public expenditure on health and social care has steadily increased over the last decade, both as a percentage of GDP and relative to other parts of the public sector in response to these pressures. Responding to such rising demands with increasingly constrained resources presents the sector with a number of key challenges.

The first challenge is to do more with less (or at best the same) resources. Potential solutions include:

- Changing working practices and reconfiguring roles to maximise efficiency.
- Encouraging innovation and using the

opportunities offered by new technology to develop new ways of working.

- Raising employee engagement to maximise productivity and retention and minimise absence.

Another challenge is to reduce the reliance on immigrant labour in some parts of the sector by developing new routes into the sector that maximise recruitment and retention. Raising employee engagement, for example by greater team working and improved management and leadership capability, should also help meet this challenge.

The third key challenge is to raise the capability of management and leadership skills to be able to respond to the various demands faced and to improve the quality of care offered, through increased in-house training and more continuous professional development.

A further challenge is to resolve acute skills shortage vacancies and gaps in key occupations, particularly professional and caring roles, by developing new routes into the sector such as apprenticeships and diplomas.

Sector Skills Insights: Digital and Creative, Williams M, Hillage J, Pinto R, Garrett R; Evidence Report 49, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES); July 2012

Sector Skills Insights: Energy, Speckesser S, Hillage J, Hogarth T, Ni Luanaigh A, Garrett R; Evidence Report 51, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES); July 2012

Sector Skills Insights: Health and Social Care, Tamkin P, Behling F, Jones R, Garrett R; Evidence Report 52, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES); July 2012

Sector Skills Insights: Tourism, Williams M, Ni Luanaigh A, Garrett R; Evidence Report 55, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES); August 2012

Managing workers affected by cancer in SMEs

Sally Wilson, IES Research Fellow

A recent study conducted by IES's work health and well-being researchers investigated experiences of managing cancer in the workplace among smaller employers. The work was commissioned by Macmillan Cancer Support (MCS) to establish whether its 'Working Through Cancer' (WTC) package of support, currently targeted at larger employers, is suitable for use by managers working in small and medium sizes enterprises (SMEs).

Experience and characteristics of SMEs

A recent survey to assess demand for this type of support showed that a significant proportion of SME managers had dealt with WTC issues in the workplace. Sixteen per cent of employers reported having experience of managing an employee affected by cancer directly, while 11% of employers reported managing someone who had cared for someone with cancer; 24% reported experience of managing one or both of these scenarios¹.

Interviews with employers and SME intermediaries identified a number of potential benefits that SMEs are able to offer when an employee is affected by cancer. In particular, the 'family mentality' often seen in smaller companies can provide a supportive environment for a member of staff dealing with a long-term illness. Many SME research participants who had managed a worker with cancer felt that they had handled the situation well and had been able to help the affected employee remain in work productively.

Getting the right balance between support and business needs

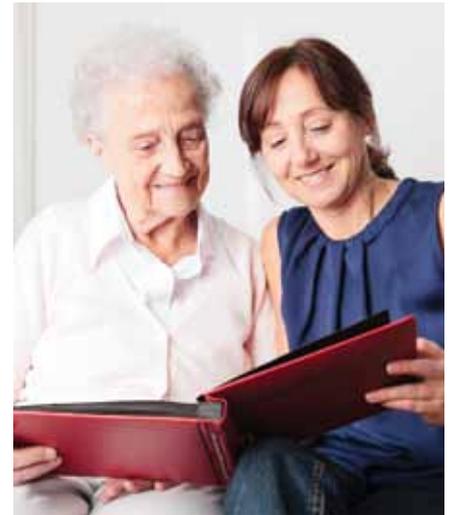
However, the study also revealed that SMEs can struggle with aspects of this scenario that benefit from having relevant experience and expertise to draw upon in-house. Also, in the absence of company policies to refer to, their approach to long-term health issues can be ad hoc. While most employers want to do the 'right thing' it can be very difficult to get the balance right between supporting an employee and making decisions that are in the interests of the business.

The cost of long-term absence can be difficult for some SMEs to absorb and it is not always viable to hold a job open for an unwell member of staff (or an employee who is a carer of someone with cancer). Further, the inconvenience of unpredictable absence can have a disproportionate effect upon staff in small organisations due to their size. And, although awareness is increasing that cancer is legally defined as a disability, smaller employers can find it hard to identify and implement suitable in-work adjustments to enable a member of staff with cancer to remain in work.

The study confirmed that many smaller businesses operate in relative isolation and have few points of reference when approaching scenarios with which they are unfamiliar. In contrast to large companies where staff can consult with a head office or other branches, contact between SME managers and the wider business world can be limited to day-to-day contact with a small number of clients and suppliers. As a result, there can be limited opportunity for managers within SMEs to update their skills or gain awareness of where to turn for help.

Need for support and advice

Employers who participated in the study tended to be unfamiliar with sources of support or advice that might facilitate management of these issues, such as Access to Work or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Health for Work Adviceline (or its equivalents in Scotland and Wales). Those who reported accessing support cited Acas, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Health and Safety Executive as sources. Without reliable sources of information and



support, SMEs potentially lose out on a view that is independent and balanced as well as informed.

The needs of carers were also considered; a number of employers had managed or co-managed a smaller business while undertaking caring responsibilities themselves. Further, many had frequently experienced difficulties keeping the business afloat when a senior member of staff with a role in running the business had been absent as a result of caring responsibilities. The responses of other key parties, such as franchisers, co-partners, and junior staff providing cover, had not always been supportive.

Conclusions

The study concluded that efforts to support SMEs to manage work and cancer issues need to acknowledge the practical considerations of 'keeping the business going' and employers' concerns regarding the financial viability of retaining staff who are not able to perform their usual duties.

A number of recommendations were made regarding the format and content of information that SMEs would prefer to receive. IES's recommendations are currently under review by MCS in advance of launching further WTC initiatives later this year.

Wilson S, Hicks B, Stevens H (2012); *Scoping the Development of Work and Cancer Support for SMEs: Executive Summary*. Report 494, Institute for Employment Studies

¹ BDRC Business Opinion Omnibus Survey (October/December 2011)

International briefings

The role of temporary agency work in facilitating transitions in the labour market

IES is working as a partner on an international research project for UNI Europa, co-ordinated by Wilke, Maack and Partner in Germany, examining the role of temporary agency work and its potential contribution to transitions in the labour market. IES is carrying out research looking at the UK, based on desk research and interviews with experts.

Research on employment in the personal and household services sector in the EU

IES has been commissioned by the French research institute ORSEU to conduct research into employment in the personal and household services sector in the UK, as part of an international comparative project for the European Commission. The research will take the form of a literature and statistical review, supplemented by interviews with stakeholders. This study forms the first part of a wider European Commission project looking into employment into this sector in the EU.

Country case studies for the International Labour Organization/World Bank

IES has been commissioned to produce country case studies of the UK and Canadian apprenticeship systems for the ILO/World Bank project on 'Possible futures for the Indian Apprenticeship system'.

Comparative Analytical Report on the impact of the crisis on industrial relations

Eurofound has commissioned IES to coordinate a comparative analytical report on the impact of the crisis on industrial relations in the EU27 Member States. The study will look at impacts on the social partners and processes such as collective bargaining, wage setting, information and consultation of employees, industrial action and dispute resolution. It will be based on national reports from each of the EU Member States.

Is the future for young people part-time HE?

Emma Pollard, IES Senior Research Fellow

This is a time of great change for the higher education (HE) sector, with reforms to tuition fees and student loans which will see up to a threefold increase in undergraduate fees but for the first time will extend eligibility for student loans to part-time students. HE students, their choices and experiences, are a key focus for the government and it is making changes to support more informed choices with the introduction of the Key Information Set this September – a standard and comprehensive set of information about courses (entry, experiences and outcomes) – launching the new National Careers Service and looking at ways to improve the application system. Change is also directed at institutions, with proposals to open up the market to allow a more diverse group of institutions to provide HE, whilst at the same time tightening controls over the number of places individual institutions can offer to better manage the continued expansion of HE at undergraduate level.

Diversity appears to be the current policy passion for HE, and diversity of provision is felt to offer better choices and experiences for students – an experience that meets the needs of students rather than those of institutions. Part-time study is an essential element of diversity: part-time study and part-time students are a significant and interesting element of HE which has tended to be overlooked by policy makers and relatively under-researched. Until now.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned IES to undertake research to build a picture of the provision or supply of part-time HE and of the issues relating to the demand for part-time study, and specifically to explore whether part-time undergraduate study can be expanded as an alternative model of study for young students (those aged 22 and under). Could potential students be persuaded to study part-time?

Building a picture of part-time study

Our research shows that part-time study is indeed an alternative to the traditional three- or four-year model of full-time study, which offers not just one 'alternative' way of

engaging with HE but a wide range of options and experiences. It can involve studying online, studying in the evenings and weekends, short intense bursts of study through summer schools, studying in further education colleges, or sitting alongside full-time students in university lecture theatres. At its best it can offer students a rewarding tailor-made experience, where students can study at the speed, time, location and level that suits them, allowing them to fit study around other work, family and life commitments and interests. Students report that studying part-time builds or at least maintains their employability, allows those in work to keep on working, and to earn whilst they learn and therefore manage study costs.

Over the past 10 years the numbers of part-time students have been growing and currently almost 600,000 people are studying part-time at undergraduate level in universities and colleges across the UK, representing one third of all undergraduate students. More than 140 HE institutions and an even greater number of further education colleges offer part-time HE level study, but the largest and most well known is the Open University, which has almost 200,000 part-time students. The



vast majority of part-time students are mature students – indeed 80 per cent are aged 25 or over – women outnumber men by two to one, part-time students are more likely than full-time students to come from areas where participation in HE is low, and half already have HE-level qualifications and so are returning to study for a second bite.

Expanding part-time study

A range of factors can affect demand for part-time study among potential students, and these are inter-related and can simultaneously suppress and encourage part-time study. Demand can be affected by the economic climate and the subdued labour market, which may make it harder for people to earn and could deter employers from sponsoring HE-level training, but at the same time it can lead individuals to consider undertaking further study to improve their chances in the jobs market. The trend towards increasing occupational regulation stimulates demand for updating and certifying skills and knowledge which could be achieved through HE study, particularly amongst those looking to enhance rather than start their careers.

The financial support now available for part-time students could increase demand as it helps individuals financially and has the additional benefit of legitimising part-time as a form of study (on a par with full-time study). However, our calculations suggest that only one third of part-time undergraduate students would meet the eligibility conditions to allow them to access the support. As full-time fees increase, part-time study with its lower (though generally pro-rata) fees may appear to be a cheaper option.

Change in attitudes is needed

The biggest challenge, however, is attitudinal. Part-time study suffers from an ill-informed yet pervasive negative image amongst young people, who feel that part-time study is for older people and not for them. They feel strongly that it takes too long and therefore delays career entry, is not valued by employers, and provides a second-class experience for those who are not 'up to' full-time study. The

evidence collected from young people is that HE study is about leaving home, meeting new people, trying new experiences and immersing themselves in their study – for them this means studying full-time for three or four years. Hence only three per cent of young people intending to go on to HE plan to study part-time. To increase interest in part-time study among most young people will therefore require: a significant shift in attitudes; investment in career education and advice targeted at young people, their teachers and parents in order to promote the full range of HE options and legitimise the part-time study mode; and a change in the part-time package so that it offers the experience that young people expect.

The changing context for HE is the topic of this year's IES policy conference, and the Institute has drawn together experts from a range of backgrounds to debate the future direction of and ambitions for HE in this turbulent time. See below for further details.

Pollard E, Newton B, Hillage J (2012) *Expanding and Improving Part-time Higher Education*, Research Paper Number 68
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The value of Higher Education Annual Policy Conference 2012

The new student financial support system starts this year, improved information is being made available to support student choice, and there is rising graduate unemployment and under-employment. It therefore seems timely to take an in-depth look at the benefits of higher education for individual students and the wider economy, society and the labour market.



The conference will:

- Provide a comprehensive insight into the current thoughts of key policy makers about the future of higher education in the UK.
- Present relevant research evidence on the social, economic and labour market impact of higher education.
- Offer plenty of opportunity to question and debate the policy and practical implications of current developments.

Who should attend?

This high-level conference is targeted at an audience of senior policy-makers,

researchers, academics and practitioners. It will be of interest to anyone concerned with the future of higher education and skills and their impact on society, the economy and the labour market.

For further information visit:

www.employment-studies.co.uk/valueofhe

Contact Gill Brown:

gill.brown@employment-studies.co.uk

Tel: 01273 763400

Scan this QR code on your mobile device to visit the conference web page



Using flexicurity to support specific groups of workers at company level

Andrea Broughton, IES Principal Research Fellow

Supporting specific types of potential employee who may have particular problems in accessing and remaining in the labour market can be a way of both helping these individuals and ensuring a motivated and committed workforce. Recent IES research examined company policies that support young workers, older workers and women, in the context of flexicurity, showing the benefits that can be gained for employees and employers alike.



Flexicurity is a concept that has been a mainstay of European employment policy since the mid-1990s. Its aims are twofold: to increase employment opportunities for workers, while increasing flexibility in order to enable employers to adapt their operations to business needs. An essential ingredient of flexicurity is that both of these elements exist in a way that is mutually reinforcing. The flexicurity model was first developed in Denmark, based on the “golden triangle” of flexible labour laws and relatively low job protection, extensive lifelong learning and active labour market policies, and a generous social security system.

The past few years have been challenging for EU labour markets, however, due to the recession, which has had a negative effect on unemployment. This has called into question the effectiveness of the flexicurity strategy in supporting certain groups of workers which

may be experiencing difficulties in gaining access to and remaining in the labour market.

In this context, IES carried out research for Eurofound, looking at company employment policies in six EU Member States (the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and the UK). The research focused on examining the measures that companies in these countries have put into place that are beneficial to young workers, older workers and women, but which at the same time could be classed as flexicurity measures, as they contain elements of both flexibility and security.

The research examined 16 case study companies from a wide range of sectors in the six EU Member States. The measures in place and the context in which the companies operate were very diverse, due to national differences in areas such as employment policy, welfare policy, social dialogue traditions, and

overall national culture. However, there were a number of overarching findings, set out below.

Key drivers for putting policies into place

We found that there needs to be a solid business reason before an organisation will put into place a particular measure. In the case of younger workers, the key drivers were a need to balance the age profile of the workforce and a desire for home-grown talent, thus avoiding costlier recruitment exercises on the open market.

In the case of older workers, companies often rely on the expertise of their workforce and therefore need to ensure that workers can carry on working as they age.

In the case of women, the main driver was a strong desire to attract and retain female

talent in a tight labour market – the employer will therefore put into place the measures that the female workforce require, such as help with childcare and flexible working time arrangements, in order to become an employer of choice.

Main challenges

The three different groups of workers in this study all faced specific challenges in accessing and remaining in employment. In the case of young workers, the main challenge was the need to develop suitable skills and qualifications and gain the necessary experience. This can often be something of a catch 22 situation in that it is difficult to gain experience without working, but many employers are not willing to take on young workers without experience. The measures we looked at focused on training, apprenticeship and work experience, aimed at helping young workers to find a job in the wider labour market, rather than at one specific company, which corresponds to wider employment security, rather than job security. For the employer, these measures offer external numerical flexibility, ie enabling variation in the size of the workforce by offering longer-term employment to its apprentices if extra workers are needed.

Older workers face different types of challenges, such as keeping their skills up to date in an ever-changing environment, countering employer perceptions that they may not be as capable, adaptable and flexible as younger workers, and coping with health and other physical challenges. The measures in place were therefore largely based on job security (providing tools and ways which enable older workers to remain in their job), and functional flexibility (allowing older workers to switch to different types of duties, for example less physically demanding work).

For women, the main challenge was trying to ensure that family responsibilities do not undermine their labour market chances, and the measures in the study are therefore based on improving combination security (ie how to combine work and private life), as well as providing some degree of internal and external numerical flexibility for employers and employees, in the form of flexibility in the organisation of working time.

Lessons learned

A number of themes emerged from the research. Firstly, we found that planning and preparation is paramount. Putting into place

measures that have the potential to change the culture of an organisation need careful planning, if problems are to be avoided. This was seen most acutely in the case of PSA Peugeot Citroën, where the organisation needed to put into place a youth training and experience measure relatively quickly in order to benefit from state aid. The company acknowledged that it would do things differently next time, in terms of staggering the entry of the numbers of young people into the organisation, ensuring more geographical variety in the intake, and preparing the young people and also the overall workforce in advance.

Secondly, informing and consulting is important. Social dialogue at company level can smooth the process of implementation. When putting a measure into place, it is wise for employers to consult with trade union or employee representatives, partly for practical reasons – employee representatives are best placed to know the views of employees about what type of measures would help them, and what will fit in with how employees organise their lives. Further, if an employer consults the workforce, they are more likely to obtain buy-in from their employees.

Thirdly, line managers should be trained and involved. In order to counteract differential treatment, based on individual line manager decision, companies need to train line managers to ensure that they are confident in implementing the measures on offer. Vodafone Italia is a good example of an organisation that recognises this and that carries out targeted training on diversity management for line managers. In addition, at University Clinic Mannheim in Germany, significant focus is placed upon manager training, especially in the areas of communication and leadership skills.

Finally, even application is vital. It is important to ensure that what is on offer does not merely benefit employees who are aware of it and can avail themselves of it easily. This is particularly the case in relation to training, which can often be picked up by those who arguably are not most in need. This can lead to an uneven application across staff of training measures, leading to a situation where those most in need of training and development – those with no or low levels of skills – are not receiving the training.

Broughton A, Biletta, I and Vacas, C, *Flexicurity: Actions at company level*, (2012) Eurofound.

International briefings

Qualitative post-test on the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks

The European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) is a pan-European survey of management and worker representatives in enterprises with more than 10 employees on how health, safety and well-being are managed at work. This project for European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) will involve in-depth cognitive interviews with ESENER respondents in five EU countries aimed at exploring the reasons and thinking behind the answers given by respondents to the survey, both to enhance understanding of what respondents mean by their answers and as a means for developing and improving the quality of future versions of the survey.

Perspectives of the European Land Armament Sector

The main aim of this study, for the European Metalworkers Federation, is to examine the medium and long-term business, industrial and employment perspectives of the European land armament sector. It is collecting state-of-the-art information, including the views of key informants, and provide robust analysis about the future of this sector, with particular emphasis on its potential for business and employment growth. The lead co-ordinator is IKEI Research (Spain), while IES is responsible for the UK case study.

Evaluation of EU-OSHA's use of the European Enterprise Network for disseminating information on Occupational Safety and Health to SMEs

IES has been commissioned by EU-OSHA to evaluate its communication partnership project (CPP), the aim of which is to improve the reach of communication on OSH topics to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Europe. The evaluation will include a desk review of relevant literature, telephone interviews with current and previous members of the CPP working group, telephone interviews with OSH Ambassadors and an online survey.

UK briefings

Research into the feasibility of developing a student satisfaction survey of taught postgraduate higher education courses

The National Centre for Social Research is working with IES to explore the feasibility, design and options for conducting a survey of taught postgraduate students, and, if appropriate, will undertake a short pilot to pave the way for a potential full-scale national survey. Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council England, the research will involve a review of domestic and international surveys, consultation with sector stakeholders, and, critically, consultation with higher education institutions. A sister research project will investigate the information needs of postgraduate students, assess the perceived usefulness of a satisfaction survey and help to develop appropriate survey questions.

Evaluation of Apprenticeship Grant for Employers of 16 to 24 year olds

At a point when youth unemployment is a particular challenge, the Apprenticeship Grant for Employment (AGE) will make a significant contribution to ameliorating this problem, with potentially major savings to the long-term social and economic costs of young people being not in employment or education. This project for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, led by BMG Research, will assess the extent to which AGE meets its numerical objectives (i.e. is distributed appropriately across size bands of SMEs and age bands of apprentices within total numbers of places) and is effectively marketed, managed, and administered. IES is leading a return-on-investment assessment and contributing to survey and qualitative research strands.

A National Strategic Skills Audit for Wales

IES has been commissioned, together with the Institute for Employment Research, to produce a National Strategic Skills Audit for the Welsh Government. The audit will draw on the most recent sources of labour market data to identify priority skills needs to help learning providers, policy makers, employers and individuals make intelligent choices about investment in learning.

Improving care for dementia sufferers through new technology

Ben Hicks, IES Research Officer

Demographic change, which is increasing the proportion of older people in our society, will be hugely challenging in terms of ensuring that the right level of care is in place for higher numbers of older people, and particularly those with specific care needs such as people suffering from dementia. One way in which dementia sufferers can engage with the world around them is through the use of new technology, and this is now being explored, supported by the development of new guidance.

Providing carers with the right guidance

IES had previously carried out work for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), looking at the use of online technologies in residential care and domiciliary and community care provision. This revealed that many care service providers working with people with dementia were keen to use online technologies to improve the service they provided for these clients, but often had difficulty in finding guidance to help them. SCIE responded to this gap by commissioning IES to undertake research into the ways in which online technologies are being used to improve the lives of people with dementia.

We wanted to base our research on examples of good practice, and therefore carried out a review of relevant literature. Unsurprisingly, as this area is still in its infancy, there was relatively little useful information to be found. Most of the information collated to date has come from interviews with academics and professionals working in the area. However, we were able to find a number of good practice examples and to devise a framework for guidance for carers.

Using new technology: key issues

One of our most important findings was that the carer is central to successful engagement with new technology. The carer needs to feel

confident in using the technology themselves before they try to support and encourage people with dementia to use it. The guidance will therefore highlight good practice points for carers to consider when supporting clients in trying out software. The main point to emphasise is that technology is best used in the context of 'everyday devices' to support activities rather than being the central focus, with the interests of the client guiding that use and the carer acting as the enabler.

While there is specialist software available for people with dementia, sensitive use of existing, widely available and often free 'apps' and programmes provides a range of entertainment and communication options. Some examples of current uses include:

- Using Powerpoint to produce life histories. People with dementia appreciate the opportunity to compile a record of their life as it helps them recall their past as their illness progresses. While life histories can be produced using paper-based media, the range of graphics available on this software help to enhance the life story and present a fuller picture of the person with dementia, including their past, present and future aspirations. Personal photographs can be uploaded and animation, voice-overs and sound/music bring colour and life to the history.
- Using software such as Photoshop to help people with dementia with their hobbies

UK briefings

Universal Credit and self employment

Universal Credit will provide a new single system of means-tested support for working-age people who are in or out of work and will change the way that self-employed people are supported by the benefits system.

This research, carried out in partnership with the Social Policy Research Unit for the Department for Work and Pensions, will develop an understanding of current self-employed tax credit claimants to support the development of the process and policy for self-employed people under Universal Credit. It will examine the ability of self-employed claimants to evidence their earnings and the genuineness of their self employment. It will also investigate how respondents will react to the policy, including how it will affect their behaviour and circumstances.

Assessing the impact of the introduction of the Apprentice Rate

A National Minimum Wage Apprentice Rate (NMWAR) at £2.50 an hour was introduced in October 2010 and increased to £2.60 recently. IES has been asked by the Low Pay Commission to deliver a research project on how the introduction of the NMWAR affected important outcome variables. We are undertaking quantitative research combining descriptive analyses and impact assessments of the NMWAR introduction, in particular:

- Statistical analysis of the "bite" of the NMWAR
- Descriptions of and impacts on levels and composition of Apprentice pay and completion of Apprenticeships

Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from HE analysis 2012

IES is analysing the data from the Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from HE for the doctoral graduate cohort. The study, carried out for Vitae, involves revisiting the clusters developed by IES and Vitae to explore whether medium-term career destinations of doctoral graduates have changed, to look at the feasibility of aggregating the 2004/05 cohort and the 2007/08 cohort to allow for more detailed analysis of outcomes and potentially to produce a new research report for the 'What Do Researchers Do?' series.



and/or creating items such as cards or calendars. People can use the internet to find pictures of their favourite foods and download recipes to make them.

- Accessing entertainment. Sites such as YouTube are invaluable when retrieving videos of old advertisements, programmes and music to help people with dementia recall earlier stages of their lives. Clients enjoy using Google Street View to find the areas in which they once lived, worked or got married.
- Increasing communication options. Email and blogs can be useful to people who otherwise have difficulties in communicating. People with dementia can use email to stay in touch with their local community and participate more in society. Skype, videophone and email can also help individuals to keep in touch with their family and friends. These media can be of particular help to people with additional disabilities such as deafness, who can sign when using Skype/videophones. These technologies can also improve communication between generations, as younger people are often keen to demonstrate the functions of these gadgets to their older relatives.

It is also important to select the right type of technology to use for the chosen activity. Touch screens appear to be more intuitive to comprehend and use for people with

dementia. However, they can be harder to type on and some current formats are too heavy for older people to use. Functions available in devices such as the Kindle are particularly useful: for example, being able to alter the font size, brighten or darken the screen and to set it to re-open at the same page as when it was turned off are all helpful functions for people with dementia.

The future

As technology advances, it is likely that continuing benefits for people with dementia will be seen. Anecdotal evidence suggests people with dementia can enjoy real improvements in well-being and social inclusion when they use new and online technology.

The findings of the IES research will be used as the basis for a guide for the care sector, which will be written by Sara Dunn Associates. It is intended that this guide will serve to encourage more care organisations and staff to engage with new technology and activities related to this. The final version of the guide will be available in late autumn 2012.

For more information, contact Linda Miller
linda.miller@employment-studies.co.uk

UK briefings

Doctoral Graduates Destinations Digest

IES is continuing to support the work of Vitae and CRAC to explore employment destinations, early careers and impact of doctoral graduates. The latest work analyses results from the Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (LDLHE) survey. This will update the picture of the experiences, outcomes and value of doctoral graduates using data for those graduating in 2006/07 and comparing it with the position of doctoral graduates from the 2004/05 cohort at the same point in their early careers. Data will be presented at the Vitae annual conference in September 2012 and be published as a digest of doctoral graduate destinations.

Evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus advisory services in Integrated Children's Centres in Communities First areas

This pilot has operated over two years in four sites across Wales. Jobcentre Plus advisers working within children's centres and in partnership with Communities First networks have aimed to reach out and support those furthest away from the labour market. IES is conducting a review for the Welsh Assembly Government of the progress made by the pilots and the extent to which the pilots have strengthened partnership working and increased employability amongst parents. The review uses a range of methodologies including analysis of background documents and management information and qualitative case study research with the pilots.

Business in the Community skills and education needs analysis

Jim Hillage worked with Business in the Community and WSP to develop a paper for the Executive Board of Yorkshire Water on the future of work and skills within the company 25 years hence. This is one of a series of future-looking papers developed for the Board as part of their strategic review.

Public sector use of collective conciliation

Andrea Broughton, IES Principal Research Fellow

Resolving workplace disputes quickly and efficiently is likely to be a priority for all organisations. However, the way in which managers go about this can differ significantly – some may prefer to use in-house resources and tools in order to settle disputes, whereas others may feel that turning to external expertise gets the best results.

Research carried out for Acas in 2010¹ looking at the use of collective conciliation among negotiators found that those in the public sector are less likely to have used Acas collective conciliation than those in the private sector and those negotiating in both sectors. Given that this seemed, at first glance, rather counter-intuitive, Acas commissioned IES to conduct a small research project looking at whether this is also the case for public sector managers and, if so, to unpack the reasons why.

Based on interviews with 15 senior human resources staff in public sector organisations in local government, central government,

the health sector, universities and colleges, our research asked interviewees about their experiences of collective conciliation and if they have not used it, or would not use it, why this was the case.

Eight of the 15 interviewees had used the Acas collective conciliation service, with many stating that they had turned to conciliation when they had reached a point of real impasse, and specifically in order to avoid industrial action or further industrial action. One organisation felt that it was no longer in a position to be able to resolve the issue in hand without external help.



Reasons for not using collective conciliation

When asked why they might not be willing to use collective conciliation in the future, interviewees gave a range of responses. Many felt that, because they had what were felt to be very good, tried and tested internal procedures to deal with collective employment disputes, it followed that they simply did not need to call in a third party in order to resolve issues. In addition, where good relationships with trade unions existed (and trade union density is higher in the public sector than in the private sector, meaning that trade unions are more likely to be present), it was felt that the parties involved would be able to settle issues between themselves. This firm basis of relationships also meant that the parties were less likely to come to an impasse where the only option would be external assistance.

Some managers spoke of a fear of losing control of a dispute if they brought in an external party, which may result in a solution with which they would not agree and while it would not necessarily be binding, they would feel pressured to accept.

Linked to this, there was also a perception that resolving disputes is a core competence of a manager's job and this should therefore not be ceded to a third party – if this were the case, the manager would have failed in some way to do their job. Fear of being seen to have failed professionally was cited as a major reason why a public sector HR manager would not want

to turn to Acas or another external party to resolve a dispute.

Some interviewees pointed to the fact that public sector organisations are often exposed to political pressures that can make it more difficult for managers to take autonomous decisions: there was therefore a fear that an external party would not appreciate organisation-specific pressures and limitations.

Overall, there were no patterns of differences between the various parts of the public sector represented in the sample, although managers in local government did tend to stress that their organisations operated in a sensitive political context, meaning that they were reluctant to work with an external party which might not fully understand the local political context.

Conclusions

It is clear that HR professionals in the public sector operate in a different environment from their counterparts in the private sector – where interviewees had worked in both public and private sectors, they were able to give interesting insights into both. This study has shed some light on the reasons why public sector HR managers might be reluctant, or do not feel that they need to turn to an external party for collective conciliation.

Acas is trying to work with organisations to get them to understand the benefits of using its support to work towards acceptable solutions to disputes. The general view is that public sector industrial relations is likely to deteriorate in the coming months due to the lasting effects of the late-2000s global financial crisis, the UK recession and subsequent public sector cuts. Pay, job security and pensions in particular are issues that will increase the likelihood of employment disputes. Given this scenario, it may be that organisations may benefit from considering working with organisations such as Acas in order to limit future conflict.

Broughton A, Cox A (2012) Institute for Employment Studies, Public sector employers' attitudes to use of Acas collective conciliation. Acas Research Paper 7/12, ACAS

- 1 Ruhemann, C. (2010) Labour Research Department, Trade union negotiating officials' use and non-use of Acas conciliation in industrial disputes. Acas Research Paper 7/10, October 2010



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IES is an independent centre specialising in research, evaluation and consultancy on employment policy and practice.

The Institute is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision-makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

The Institute has over 40 staff and associates, skilled in the full range of social research methodologies for data collection and analysis. Techniques employed include: quantitative surveys (using face-to-face, telephone and postal methods); expert and informant interviews; case studies; qualitative interviews; and focus groups.

Clients include major public agencies involved in the development, design and delivery of public employment policy at local, sectoral, regional, national and international level.

Key contacts

UK labour market and employment policy: Jim Hillage, Annette Cox
International labour market and employment policy: Nigel Meager, Andrea Broughton



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

Institute for Employment Studies

Sovereign House, Church Street
Brighton BN1 1UJ, UK
T +44 (0) 1273 763400

E askies@employment-studies.co.uk

Also at:
Watergate House
13/15 York Buildings
London WC2N 6JU

The articles from this newsletter are also posted on our website:
www.employment-studies.co.uk

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Recent issues of Employment Studies have focused on how evidence-based policy-making is coming under pressure in the current political and economic climate. In the last issue we noted the increasingly cavalier regard for the existing evidence in the discussion of UK migration policy.

Since then, a more egregious example has featured in the policy debate, albeit one which subsequently foundered on the rocks of internal coalition disagreement. I refer to the Beecroft report¹ on employment law commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), and the associated proposals to increase the qualifying threshold for unfair dismissal from one year to two. From the perspective of evidence-based policy-making, the concern is not simply the content of the proposals (of which more shortly) but the form in which they are presented. The Beecroft report, covering a wide range of major employment regulations, including unfair dismissal, collective redundancies, small firms' exemptions, work permits, and equal pay, is 16 pages long. These pages consist mainly of views and assertions with no reference to any evidence on which they might be based, despite the existence of a significant body of high quality research on all the topics covered by the report. Some press criticism focused on the whether the report's author (Adrian Beecroft) was appropriately qualified for the role (he is a venture capitalist with a degree in physics). Arguably this would be less important if, as has previously been the norm for such government reports, his work was supported by a secretariat, reviewing existing research and taking evidence from experts. A good example of this was the 2007 Freud report on Welfare-to-Work. Equally controversial, and with an author (David Freud, now a Conservative minister) drawn from the investment banking community rather than the employment policy world, this report was at least heavily rooted in the existing research and data, and the proposals significantly more soundly based as a result.

The contrast between Freud and Beecroft is instructive, and raises a question about how far it signals a move away from evidence-based policy-making in the current parliament. It's too early to say, but it's worth noting that the Beecroft report is not an isolated example. The model of choosing a prominent business person to present their personal views on a policy issue, and issuing those views as an

'independent' government report, with little or no underlying evidence behind them, is not uncommon. Examples of this 'evidence-light' approach include: the thoughts on how government should go about its procurement activities, by retailing tycoon, Sir Philip Green, in a report of 33 Powerpoint-style pages² for the Cabinet Office in late 2010, widely lampooned in the press and policy circles; and the more recent views³ of Lord Young on business start-up support for BIS.

Of course, it could be argued that what matters is whether the recommendations of these reports can be justified by evidence, even if the reports themselves are not diligent in citing that evidence. So returning to the employment policy arena, do the Beecroft proposals in fact stand up to the evidence? As several expert labour economists (including John Van Reenen at the LSE and Jonathan Portes from NIESR) have pointed out, they really don't.

The underlying premise of the Beecroft report is set out in its claim "Many regulations, conceived in an era of full employment, are designed to make employment more attractive to potential employees... in today's era of a lack of jobs, those regulations simply exacerbate the national problem of high unemployment". In fact, as shown by numerous cross-country studies, using the data compiled by the OECD on the strength of employment regulation, the UK benefits from one of the most liberal employment protection regimes in the Western World (the latest data show that only in the USA and Canada is it easier for employers to hire and fire than in the UK). Additionally, such research shows that any effect of employment regulation on overall job creation is weak or ambiguous: at any point of time it is easy to find examples of countries with a heavy regulatory burden that perform well in job creation terms, and countries with light regulation that perform poorly (and vice versa) As the OECD puts it "There appears to be little or no association between employment protection legislation strictness and overall unemployment". A good simple summary of the relevant evidence is in John Van Reenan's recent blog⁴.

Similarly, if we look at trends over time, there is no evidence that changes in employment protection have been associated with changes in the rate of job creation. Thus take, for example, the proposed change in

the threshold for unfair dismissal. Since unfair dismissal legislation was first introduced in the 1970s, the threshold has been changed several times: it began at six months, was increased to a year, then to two years, before being reduced again to a year. There is no evidence that any of these previous changes have improved (or impaired) the rate of job creation, and it is unlikely that a further increase in the threshold to two years will have such an effect. It is hard to imagine circumstances in which any competent employer will not have been able to assess an employee's suitability and performance within a year of hiring him or her, and to have taken appropriate steps in cases where the match is not good. Indeed, in this specific case it is possible that the change will have unintended consequences and that employees who believe they have been unfairly dismissed before the two-year threshold and no longer able to claim unfair dismissal may seek alternative sources of redress, through the discrimination jurisdictions which apply from the first day of employment (and which the government cannot alter because they are enshrined in European law). There is evidence that this already happens in cases of unfair dismissal before the one-year threshold.

As Van Reenan points out, what the evidence does show is that reforms relating to benefits, training and skills, and welfare-to-work programmes are far more important in affecting labour market performance than tweaks to employment protection legislation. This is where the evidence-based policy action should be targeted, rather than the proposals in the Beecroft report.

To conclude, we should also note that the tendency in government is not all in one direction, and there are also some welcome recent initiatives to strengthen the evidence base of policy (e.g. a proposal from the Cabinet Office for the greater use of experimental methods in social and economic policy⁵). It is to be hoped that moves in the latter direction gain the upper hand.

- 1 <http://news.bis.gov.uk/imagelibrary/downloadmedia.ashx?MediaDetailsID=5551>
- 2 <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/sirphilipgreenreview.pdf>
- 3 <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/enterprise/docs/m/12-827-make-business-your-business-report-on-start-ups.pdf>
- 4 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2012/05/28/evidence-based-policy-beecroft-van-reenen/>
- 5 <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/TLA-1906126.pdf>